COMIC TALK #7 • AUGUST 1993 •

COMIC TALK

BATMAN © 1993 DC COMICS

DENNY O'NEIL & MIKE MANLEY TALK ABOUT BATMAN #500

ALSO: DOUG MOENCH & GRAHAM NOLAN

ISSUE #7

MANLEY

COMIC TALK™

Volume 1 - Number 7 - AUGUST - 1993

PUBLISHER
Fred Greenberg

EDITOR
Ed Polgardy

MANAGING EDITOR
Thomas Harrington

LAYOUT & GRAPHICS
Rolf Saint-Agnes
Dale Monn

GRAPHICS ADVISOR
John Workman

COVER
Mike Manley

INTERVIEWER
Darwin McPherson

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Phil Marino

All of the artwork from pages 1 through 22 is trademarked and copyright (c) 1993 DC Comics; pages 23-25 (c) Marvel Comics; pages 26-28, 32 (c) 1993 LucasFilms and West End Games; pages 29-31 (c) Warren Murphy, published by Marvel Comics. Interviews (c) 1993 Darwin McPherson.

COMIC TALK is trademarked and copyright (c)1993 **Buffalo Books**. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, mechanically, photographically, and/or electronically, without prior written consent of the publisher. All comic book characters, names, Logos, trademarks, and symbols depicted and described in the interviews, on the cover, in ads, and/or any other editorial materials are trademarked and copyright their respective owners.

All inquiries (including advertising and letters to the editor should be addressed to: **COMIC TALK**, 225 Everitts Road, Ringoes, NJ 08551-1610, or call (908) 788-2780.

Any statements or opinions made, expressed, or implied in **COMIC TALK** are solely those of the interviewer or persons being interviewed and do not represent the editorial position of the publisher, who accepts no responsibility for such statements.

Printed in the U.S.A

INTRODUCTION:

COPYRIGHT © DC COMICS

It's no secret.

Bane has taken Bruce Wayne out of commission and it's up to good ol' Azrael to put on the Bat-suit and become the Batman. I've known for a while, just like the rest of the free world. In fact, I knew earlier than most.

*However, in the course of conducting the following interviews, I wasn't–I won't say "allowed,"–*encouraged *to discuss such developments. We stressed that this issue wouldn't see print until the big news was already out, but none of our subjects would say anything.*

Of course I understand. They were instructed by DC to keep it quiet and they did. As a copywriter for DC, I totally understand the need for confidentiality. The only problem is, while these interviews were being transcribed and edited, every newspaper and radio station was saying what these four gentlemen wouldn't.

So has this issue been served after *its time? I don't think so. The basic goal remains the same. We set out to conduct interesting, insightful interviews without worrying about the "big secret" and that's what we did.*

You aren't going to get the "behind the scenes" secrets of Azrael's assumption of the Bat-mantle, but I think we all agree that there's more to Batman than that. His history transcends and encompasses the Azrael development, but where it goes from here is yet to be seen.

And that's why we read the comics, isn't it?

Darwin McPherson

Darwin McPherson

DENNY:

SOMEHOW THE NIGHT HAS BECOME A VAST OCEAN THROUGH WHICH HE SWIMS, BUOYED AND WEIGHTLESS ABOVE A GOTHIC ATLANTIS DRENCHED IN DARK WONDER AND SECRET SIN.
IT IS A PLACE LONG SINCE CURSED BY A FLOOD FROM HEAVEN, AND FORSAKEN BY TRUE LIGHT.
COPYRIGHT © DC COMICS

Darwin McPherson: What can you tell me about what's happening in *Batman* #500?

Denny O'Neil: The only thing I'm free to talk about is that Batman gets a new costume. It's the first real change in 54 years. They added the yellow oval back in the '60s. That was the only modification the costume had over time.

Stuff like the length of the ears and the length of the cape, I tend to leave up to the artists on the theory that Batman has many costumes for various occasions. The new costume will be the result of a major upheaval in the storyline. Right now, we're about a third of the way through "Batman: Knightfall." *Batman* #500 concludes "Knightfall" and begins "Knightquest."

Out of these will come Catwoman and Robin ongoing series. They will spin directly out of the stunts we're doing.

McPherson: Is there a practical reason why Batman is getting a new costume?

O'Neil: Yeah, but it's part of the storyline. This is a stunt that's driven by the story. The Superman thing was done largely the same way. That makes me very happy since I figured about three years ago that what I basically am is a storyteller. The new costume is motivated by the storyline rather than motivated by "Gee, let's put a new costume on Batman and see what happens."

It probably won't be the last. This one probably won't be frozen in time as long as the other.

"Knightquest" then will branch off into some other books. The story will take two separate lines involving two separate sets of characters. Some of which will run in *Batman* and *Detective*; some of which will run in issues #5 and #6 of *Justice League Task Force*. It'll also appear in *Shadow of the Bat* in, I think, issues #19, 20, and 21 and will wrap up in *Legends of the Dark Knight*. That will be one part of the storyline.

They'll be parallel plots. While they'll occasionally touch on each other, we're trying to put this thing together carefully so that we can play fair with people who may not have complete access to all comics or may not be able to afford to buy a dozen comics.

The storylines will be called "Knightquest: The Crusade" and "Knightquest: The Search." If you follow "The Search," you won't necessarily have to follow "The Crusade" and vice versa. However, to get the whole picture, the whole epic story that we're spinning, you should read both. But they will be self-contained enough so that you'll get your money's worth if you don't.

McPherson: How long will these stories run?

O'Neil: Approximately ten months.

McPherson: That's a long time.

O'Neil: Yeah, they will segue right into next year's annuals.

McPherson: What can you tell us about the *Catwoman* and *Robin* series?

O'Neil: *Catwoman* #1 comes out the same time as *Batman* #498 and *Robin* #1 comes out September '93 with *Batman* #501. In the case of *Catwoman*, the story spins out of "Knightfall." In the case of Robin,

"Knightquest." But again, you don't have to read everything in these story lines to understand.

What motivates Catwoman to go on her first solo adventure is something that happens in "Knightfall," but it's explained in the first issue. If you've never heard of Batman or Robin or "Knightfall" or anything, you'll still be able to read *Catwoman* #1 as a complete story.

McPherson: Is Catwoman going to be a villain or hero?

O'Neil: We're not going to soften her a whole lot. The cover copy I just wrote is: "When she's bad, she's very, very bad." I think that'll be the tag line for the story. She has never been a black, unregenerate villain like the Joker and the Penguin. She's been a thief and a professional criminal with her own rigid ethic, so you better not cross her.

But on the other hand, she won't go out of her way to hurt somebody. She wouldn't hurt anybody at all unless she was strongly motivated...unless somebody significantly interfered with her life.

It's going to be a very glamorous book with Jim Balent doing the art and Jo Duffy scripting. It'll have something of James Bond and of the Saint. And, of course, a lot of Batman. We'll be taking her all over the world, which may give Jo Duffy a lot of good travel tax deductions.

McPherson: Will Catwoman be pursued by any official agency?

O'Neil: I'm sure that'll happen from time to time. We've toyed with the idea of giving her an adversary apart from Batman who would be an ongoing character in the series. It's a little too early to deal with that because the first three issues will constitute one story. That will be pretty much Catwoman doing something she feels she has to do. It'll take her from Gotham City to Santa Prisca and probably to Europe after that.

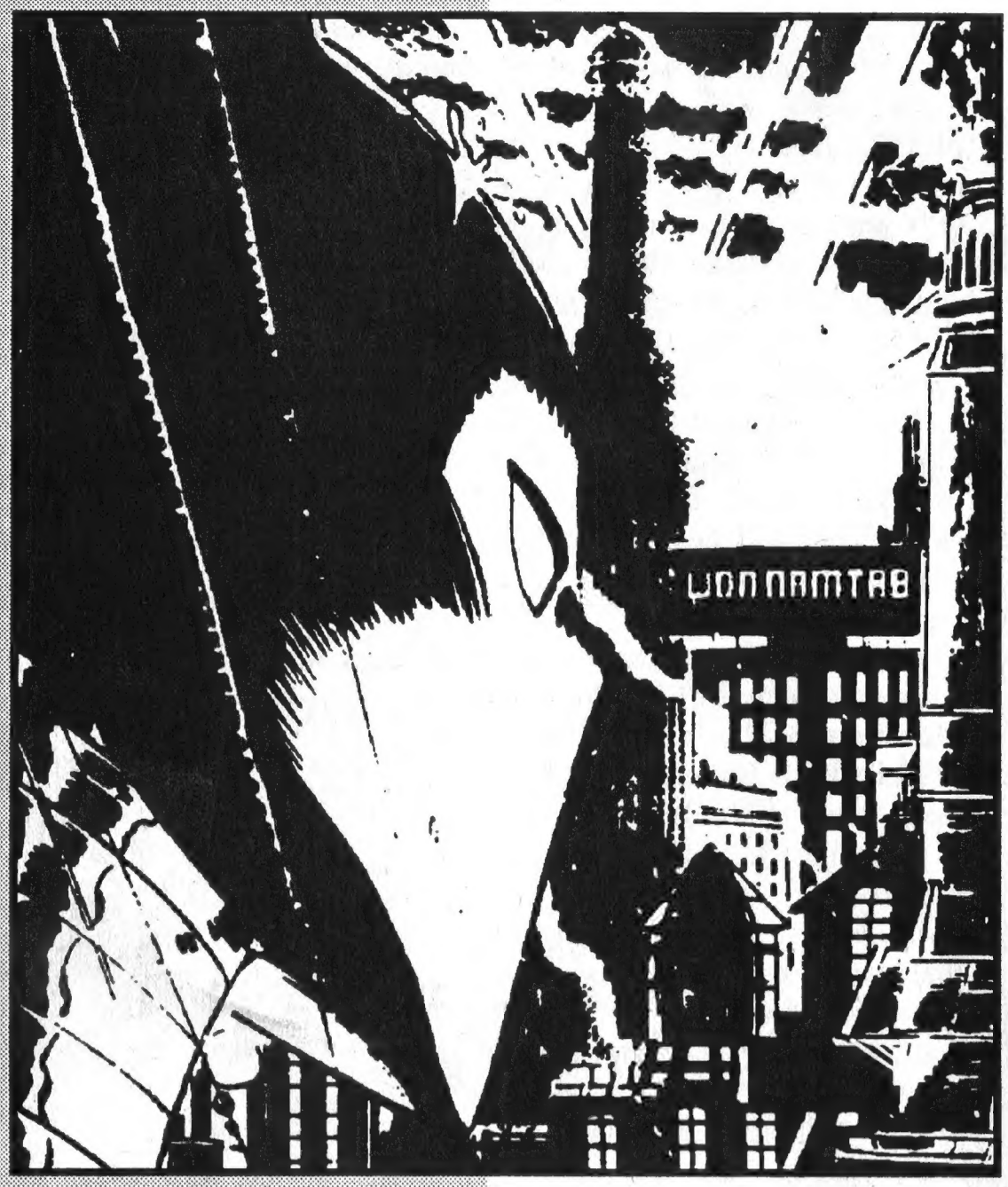
McPherson: How about *Robin?*

O'Neil: With *Batman* #501, tensions down in the Batcave come to the point where Robin feels he has to leave and go out on his own. The first stories will deal with that break. We'll follow him off on his own adventures. Chuck Dixon has been quietly building his own rogues' gallery for three years now, so we'll have no trouble doing it.

Somewhere down the line, we will probably reintegrate the two books. But for a while, Robin will be solo, not dealing in any real way with Batman or Alfred...maybe dealing with Harold a little bit.

"THE NEW COSTUME ... PROBABLY WON'T BE THE LAST. THIS ONE PROBABLY WON'T BE FROZEN IN TIME AS LONG AS THE OTHER."

HE KNOWS HIS MIND HAS BEEN VIOLATED BY THE SYSTEM. BUT HE DOES NOT CARE. THE WILD NIGHT STILL SCREAMS FOR WHATEVER HE HAS BECOME, SHAPED BY UNSEEN HANDS FOR UNDREAMED PURPOSE.
AND, FOR HIS OWN REASONS, HE IS WILLING CLAY.
IT WAITS FOR HIM OUT THERE. THE BRUTE DEMONIC FORCE WHICH SMASHED THE OLD AND CREATED THE NEW.



McPherson: When you say reintegrate, do you mean Batman will appear with Robin in *Robin*?

O'Neil: Robin will start appearing in *Batman* and *Detective* and *Shadow of the Bat.* It won't happen for a while. We'll want to give the kid his own identity. He's cutting the cord and establishing himself as a solid character on his own.

Catwoman, also. We think they're strong enough characters that they don't necessarily need Batman to be interesting. I think that my creative people did an astonishing job on Robin, rebuilding the character from the ground up. He's more popular now than he's ever been.

McPherson: Do you have an artist for *Robin?*

O'Neil: Yeah, Tom Grummett.

McPherson: At the time of this interview, we're about a third through "Knightfall" and it seems to be getting more and more popular...

O'Neil: Yeah, we've gone back to press with all of the books that are in the series so far. We're bringing out the *Sword of Azrael* paperback a month earlier than we had originally anticipated. It has a much larger print run than I've ever seen for this kind of thing. That really is an integral part of the new series.

McPherson: Do you think *Batman* #500 will get as much attention as the death and return of Superman?

O'Neil: I can never predict those things. Already, I am surprised. We–sixteen months ago when we

"WE ANTICIPATED A LOT OF READER REACTION, BUT I DIDN'T ANTICIPATE AS MUCH AS WE'RE GETTING. WE'RE FAIRLY EARLY INTO IT."

first thought of this–anticipated a lot of reader reaction, but I didn't anticipate as much as we're getting. We're fairly early into it.

I also didn't know about the "Death of Superman" when I put this underway. Mike [Carlin] and I were not group editors back then. We were just editors in charge of our own line of books. As long as he wasn't using Batman or I wasn't using Superman, there was no need for us to compare notes. By the time that I'd found out that he was doing the "Death of Superman," I was well into my storyline. We had already done a lot of ground work, a lot of setting up of what was to come later. Neither Mike nor I had known we were both planning big, major stunts this year. I might not have done mine this year if I had known he was doing his.

There are two major characters having major storyline changes, things changing continuity that goes back a half century. It might've been too much, but it's not. The reaction so far for the Batman storyline has exceeded everything I could've anticipated. That's very gratifying.

McPherson: Have you heard anything specific from the fans?

O'Neil: I've heard most via my students at the School of Visual Arts, lots of rumors. I'm obviously not going to confirm or deny any of them. I can say this much: No rumor I've heard (and there must be a dozen different versions out there) has gotten it exactly right.

McPherson: What do you think about the fact that so many people have even a hint of an idea of what's happening in *Batman* #500 before it comes out?

O'Neil: It's fine with me because it shows that they're reading and that they're interested. We all want to tell our stories to a lot of people. We all want people to pay atten-

tion and when that happens, it's very nice.

Well, that's exactly what's happening. It doesn't really bother me that people are speculating that the rumors are true. Like I said, none of the rumors I've heard are right on the money. So what it means is my creative people are really doing their jobs well.

McPherson: How do these rumors get out?

O'Neil: That baffles me; I don't know. The fan grapevine is astonishing. I think I know how they get disseminated and that's through computer bulletin boards.

McPherson: What do you think about all the marketing gimmicks in comics nowadays?

O'Neil: I think that cover enhancements and other promotional stunts are fine if they call attention to a good story. That's the way we use them. Every time we've done something like that, we have felt that we were backing it up with something that real readers buy comic books for. Every reason you buy a super-hero comic, we think we're delivering–quite apart from whatever gimmicks are on the cover or in the polybag or any of that. I have no quarrel with those kinds of things provided they are used to call attention to something that you should think is worth attention.

For their own sake...I'd have to question that.

McPherson: How about the *Robin* mini-series? As good as any one issue was, wouldn't you hope that the latest issue of *Detective* is just as good? But only on anniversary issues are the enhancements used.

O'Neil: Well, sure, we try to hit a high standard of storytelling every time out. That's what we do. But some stories are, by their very nature, events. That's when it seems to be appropriate to use a gimmick.

On *Batman #500*, we're using an enhanced cover. There's a major storyline and it's only the fourth comic book to hit that number, which, in itself, is an event worth paying attention to. And then, it's the last of the Jim Aparo *Batman*s and the first of the Mike Manleys, so there's a major change in creative personnel.

With the *Robin* thing, each of them was a strong story. Each of them helped solidify and reshape a character that had been in existence since 1940. We thought if what you like is pulp action and adventure with real characterization, that's what we're delivering. Hence I had no objection when other people in the organization suggested enhanced covers. Each of them, I would argue, was an event.

McPherson: You mentioned an artistic change in *Batman* #500?

O'Neil: Yeah. Half of *Batman* #500 will be done by Jim Aparo. At a natural break in the story, Mike Manley will take over the pencils.

McPherson: Is Jim Aparo gone for good?

O'Neil: Not for good. He's going to be doing *Green Arrow* for Scott Peterson and he'll do occasional Batman projects. In fact, I'm go-

ing to give him a script either today or tomorrow after I get around to looking at it and doing whatever minor editing is necessary. It's a Batman story; it'll probably appear sometime in the next year.

He is one of the quintessential Batman artists. I would not like to think that I'm not going to work with him again. I will look for projects that we can do together.

McPherson: Is the personnel on *Detective Comics* lined up now?

O'Neil: Yeah. I'm not really able to talk about that because I don't edit it. I'd much rather that you talk to Scott Peterson about what's going on in *Detective.*

McPherson: Does that mean the crossovers between *Batman* and *Detective* are going to stop? Will they still have the close continuity that they've always had?

O'Neil: It's going to be, for awhile, very, very tightly integrated continuity. Then after that, it'll revert to maybe a slightly tighter version of what we've been doing lately.

We have been accused of not doing continuity between our books in print and I've never gotten around to replying to that. I would argue that it's absolutely not true. For about three years, we've been doing the kind of continuity where, at the end of the year–if you want to bother to sit down and make a time line–everything will fit. Except things that we specifically label as being outside of continuity, which includes some of the graphic novels and some of the stories occurring in *Legends of the Dark Knight.*

It's just that I haven't done the thing that Mike has done with Superman–where a story ends in *Action Comics* and ten seconds later in comic book time, it picks up in one of his other titles.

But all major events–the death of Robin's mother, introduction of Harold, introduction of Jean-Paul--they haven't been simultaneous. It's a different kind of continuity, but I would argue that it's no less integrated. It's just structured differently.

I do that for practical reasons and some aesthetic ones. I hire people who are strong storytellers; it's one of my criteria. I want to give them as much autonomy as possible. Also, to really do that, you've got to get everybody together in a group a lot and one of my writers lives sixty miles outside London. We do get together about three or four times a year, but we can't do it every month. However, I think we've achieved just as tight a continuity as anybody would want. I've got it on my computer as we speak. A time line. I can tell you by looking at this computer screen when any one thing happens and how it is reflected in the other books.

McPherson: Since we're talking about continuity...how about the concern that a lot of fans have about Batman appearing in *Justice League* and guest-starring in something like *Starman* or *Black Condor* where it has no relevance in *Batman* or *Detective?*

O'Neil: In *Justice League*, no comment.

The others...Usually those guys show me this stuff and if they have Batman doing something Batman wouldn't do, I change it or I ask that it be changed. We could probably fit that into the continuity. Those are never appearances that, in comic book time, take weeks; it's usually like one day or one afternoon

or a one night appearance. We can show that it happened like: on Monday, Batman got done fighting the Joker, on Tuesday, he's with the Black Condor, on Wednesday, the Penguin story started. Something like that.

They're not in our continuity, but they don't contradict it. What's important is that the characterizations are consistent.

In the old days at DC, editor A and editor B both did Batman. They did radically different versions where only the costume was the same and some of the props. That's one of the things we've managed to eliminate. Anything that involves continuity with Batman has to be okayed by me. Any borrowing of Batman or any of my cast of characters I have to okay. I tend not to be too stingy about it because Batman usually is an enhancement to any story he appears in.

McPherson: Though he enhances the stories he's in, don't you think those appearances are a liability to him because they undermine his mysterious persona?

O'Neil: Well, in recent years, I did manage to keep him from being a daylight character. Except in a couple of instances in *Superman* where I thought that the story justified the daylight appearance. But we've tried to maintain the mysterious image.

In the old days, Batman would walk down a city street on a bright summer day waving to people. I almost always insist that if he appears with other people or the characters are in a crowd scene, he's in a shadow. Unless the story absolutely demands that he step out into the light to save somebody's life or something like that, he does remain a shadowy figure.

The other part of the answer would be that I think that Batman is an important part of the DC Universe, despite the fact that he's much more independent than most of our heroes. For him to remain an integral part of the DC Universe, he does have to interact with the other characters from time to time.

McPherson: So why not let him be a member of the Justice League?

O'Neil: I had him written out of the *Justice League* because he's essentially a loner. He's not a character who would be interested in working with a lot of other people.

He's also not too interested in going out of Gotham City. He's the city's guardian angel. In our current storyline, the Wayne fortune is based on Gotham real estate. He's really in and of that place.

I will cop out on early *Justice League* stories. In recent times, very, very often Batman has *not* been used in a Justice League story and I've suggested some alternative character. Sometimes the alternative character can be Robin, whom I don't perceive as anywhere near as standoffish and as much as a loner as Batman.

McPherson: Let me ask you something about the characters. Would you say that Batman has to be Bruce Wayne since Robin obviously doesn't have to be Dick Grayson or even Jason Todd?

"AZRAEL IS STILL, TO SOME DEGREE, AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY. HE KNOWS WHAT HIS NAME IS, WHO HIS FATHER WAS, BUT HE HAS NO IDEA WHAT'S AT THE CORE OF HIS PERSONALITY."

O'Neil: I don't know. Good question.

Batman is as much as anything an archetype. Part of what the "Elseworlds" stories are about is taking the archetype and putting it in a different context. I don't know...that's an interesting question.

McPherson: How would you compare the methods of Batman, Robin, Catwoman, and Azrael?

O'Neil: Catwoman and Azrael are certainly lacking the element of compassion. It's not brought center stage very much in Batman, but it's always there in an unstated way.

Robin's *modus operandi* is very close to Batman's because he is, in a way, Batman's creature. I would say he's probably a bit more technologically oriented and a hell of a lot more sociable. Batman is not somebody who you would necessarily want to hang around with if he existed. I think anybody I know would be happy to spend an evening with Tim Drake. He's a much lighter character; he's much friendlier.

Catwoman is capable of utter ruthlessness if you get in her way. If her own personal code of ethics demands retribution, she will deal with you harshly.

Jean-Paul/Azrael is still, to some degree, an unknown quantity. Because part of his character we will explore, I would guess over the next several years, is that he's been brainwashed and he does not know who he is. In a way, he's like the Question. He knows what his name is, who his father was, but he has no idea what's at the core of his personality. What we've seen so far indicates that he can be a very hard-edged guy indeed. He does not have as many scruples as Batman...as Bruce.

I think of Batman as the real character and Bruce Wayne as the mask. When I say Batman, it means Batman/Bruce.

McPherson: You mentioned that Batman's compassion isn't seen very frequently, but I actually think we see it quite often. Where does his mercy come from? He doesn't have much reason to have any since he saw his parents killed right before his eyes.

O'Neil: It's a yin/yang thing, Darwin. It's the other side of the coin of his mission to stamp out crime. It all stems from that traumatic childhood experience which involved a couple of horrific and unmerited deaths. At the same time that he has this burning passion for justice, he also believes that human life is sacred and that

HNNUKK
SHWIII

human beings suffer because of injustice. The compassion and the sense that human life is sacred, those are really integral to the character. They're as important to the characterization as all the other stuff–the brilliant detective work, the acrobatics. And underlying all that, the mission is self-imposed.

Of course, I've explained this probably a hundred times in the past eight years. Batman is not crazy. He's not driven. He's certainly not psychotic and no more neurotic than the rest of us, because he understands what he's doing. He's in control of it. He's made a choice and the choice is: "Okay, this is probably the best thing I can do with my life. It's certainly something that I am uniquely qualified to do. Nobody else on the planet has this combination of traits and skills and so on." It's a very conscious choice.

Theoretically, he could make a choice to stop doing it, whereas if he were psychotic, he wouldn't have that option. I think there's a hell of a difference between psychosis and obsession. He may be obsessed; he's certainly not crazy.

McPherson: Do you think Batman's commitment to working within the system and being merciful limits his effectiveness?

O'Neil: Yeah. If these fictional worlds were real, probably the Shadow would've been a more effective crime fighter than Batman. He's not exactly in the system, it's just that he does not violate it. He doesn't work in it, but he doesn't destroy it either.

I'd say that if the Shadow existed, he'd have to be a wanted fugitive. It's like the Guardian Angels here in New York. They are arguably a force for good and they probably prevent a lot of subway crimes. Yet they're pretty much mistrusted by the establishment because they're not in the establishment and they don't exactly play by the rules.

Well, Batman is a Guardian Angel times a hundred. Most cops on the beat don't trust him and certainly not most police officials. Then there would be a few who'd say, "Yeah, he's helping us. He's a good guy." And poor Gordon, caught right in the middle, right on the fence.

Another concept that I haven't been too successful in communicating to our audience is: "Does Gordon know who Batman is? If so, why doesn't he do something about it and if not, why not?" Again, I think it's a choice. I'm very big on existential choices.

He's a very smart cop and he's had more contact with Batman than anybody, so he could figure it out. He chooses not to. I think that was a misunderstood part of [Frank] Miller's "Batman: Year One." Yeah, he could've looked up on that bridge and he could've seen who was riding that motorcycle. He chose not to. He chose to blur his vision because it's better for him not to know.

Even if he suspects, it's better for him not to know. If he knew, it would have to change his behavior. That would ruin something that is very important to him both personally and professionally.

Basically, he's got a good thing going and he doesn't want to mess with it.

McPherson: How do most of the people of Gotham City feel about Batman? Do they have an underlying fear or suspicion of him or are they grateful he's around to go head-to-head with guys like the Joker?

O'Neil: Both. If I were a citizen of Gotham City, I don't think I'd want to hang around with Batman. I don't think I'd have anything to talk to him about. I think politically we would be pretty far apart.

On the other hand, if I was walking home from the subway at three a.m., I'd be very happy to have him around. It's the same way that a lot of people feel about

law enforcement in general. They don't like cops per se, but they're very glad to see the cop walking down their block after dark.

The character is evolving. All comic book characters that last evolve to some degree. He's evolving more into a nighttime character. That does not necessarily equate with grim-and-gritty and more violent, but darker. Very gradually, we're taking him out of situations where he's on television, for example.

It's a creative decision. He would go a long way to avoid being in front of a television camera. So there are probably some citizens in Gotham who don't know that he exists or are not sure. Probably, most of them don't really know what they think about it.

We're not completely consistent with this because, as I said, it's a process. One of the great secrets of editing this stuff is to allow the process to happen and not make changes for their own sake. If you see a tendency and it seems right, then step back and let it occur.

McPherson: What kind of story do you prefer–the kind that Jim Starlin did where Batman is the only supernatural force and the crime is like what we read in the paper or the ones like Alan Grant's where you have a grandiose villain with a nickname and a gimmick to match his personality?

O'Neil: One of the things that attracted me to the character as a writer years and years ago was that he's protean enough that you can tell a lot of different kinds of stories. With most super-heroes, the range of story you can tell is really pretty limited.

With Batman, you can do everything from...well, one shouldn't use the work "realistic," but..say, "magic realism" in the sense that South American novelists use it. You can do those kinds of stories or you can do the flamboyant super-villain kinds of stories.

The character, as we define him, will accommodate both, so I don't necessarily have a preference. I can qualify that by saying that grotesque villains, I think, are an essential part of the appeal. And as long as I'm driving this particular bus, there will always be stories about characters like the Joker and the Penguin and so on.

The other is an occasional change of pace, sure. As an even more occasional change of pace, stories might deal with supernatural things that go bump in the night. We overdid those a couple of years back. I think they should be once or twice a year. A change of pace and not the norm.

Essentially, what the character is about is humanity. It's about human perfectibility. Another thing that seems to me integral to Batman as he has evolved is the idea that he is a detective. He uses his brains as much as he uses his muscle.

It's just that since a guy sitting there is not dramatic, sometimes that happens off stage. Though occasionally, we put it on stage just to remind people that it's more than a guy crashing through a skylight.

McPherson: We've seen many interpretations of Batman's origin. Not in the inspiration to become Batman, but the process afterward. Taking up with different trainers and so forth. Is there, in your set-up, a big story that various writers can take pieces of or can they make it up as they go along?

O'Neil: We have a very loose time line. Our official Batman biography says that: From ages twelve to twenty-three, he bounced around the world picking up information. Not quite sure exactly what he was going to do with it. Knowing he was going to be some kind of crime fighter. Sometimes as Bruce Wayne, sometimes with disguises and assumed names.

He went all over the place. If he heard about an extraordinary martial artist in China, he'd find a way

to get into China and hang out with that guy. If he heard there was a ballistics expert who was the best in the country in Michigan, he'd go find a way to hang out with that guy. We've done a couple of those stories where he apprentices himself to detectives.

I would assume there are more of these stories to be told. I've deliberately kept it loose to accommodate any good ideas any writers have about filling in the gaps in that eleven year period.

McPherson: Are you going to be writing any Batman stories that we can look forward to?

O'Neil: I'm going to do a big piece of "Knightquest: The Search." I'll do two stories in *Justice League Task Force* #s 5 and 6. Then almost immediately, I'll jump into the three issue *Legends of the Dark Knight* arc that will kind of wrap up that storyline. I've already written *Legends* #50, which will be out pretty soon. That's "Joker: Year One."

Somewhere down the line, Dick Giordano and I are talking about doing a series about Commissioner Gordon and I'm toying with the idea of doing another Azrael mini-series. That's about it. That's plenty for this year, given the fact that I do some outside writing and I teach two nights a week and I work here about forty-five to fifty hours a week.

McPherson: What other non-Batman writing are you doing?

O'Neil: Oh, I've done a science fiction short story for an anthology that John Varley is editing. I'm about to do a hard-boiled detective story for an anthology that Max Allen Collins is editing.

I co-wrote with my wife a piece on meditation for the new *Superman/Batman* magazine that Charlie Kochman is editing. It's Robin instructing the Huntress on mediation. It's something I've been interested in for probably more than twenty years. It's something my wife teaches to her sixth, seventh and eighth graders. And it's something Charlie, who has a real deep interest in martial arts, thought he'd like a little piece about. That's probably the strangest project that I've done in a long time, but one of the most satisfying.

I think kids should know about that stuff. I think it's something that can keep us all sane and Marifran has a method she finds works particularly well with children.

And there's a possibility I'll do another Batman teleplay. That depends on a lot of x-factors, among them, whether or not they need any more. The one I've written has

"I'M GOING TO DO A BIG PIECE OF 'KNIGHTQUEST'."

"THERE'S A POSSIBILITY I'LL DO ANOTHER BATMAN TELEPLAY."

not aired; that'll be out sometime next month.

Often enough, some little project or other comes along. I still like to write after all these years. When they come along, if they don't interfere with something, I tend to say "yes."

McPherson: Are we going to see any more of the Question?

O'Neil: Yeah. Yeah, I forgot about that. As soon as I can pry open a month in my schedule, I'm going to do a 56-page Question one-shot.

Archie [Goodwin] already has the cover.

I've some ideas, but there are about four ways we can go because, essentially with *Question* #36, we ended that big story. But there's still a number of unexplored possibilities that are built into the character. Sometime later this year, I'll pick one of them and work out a story and consult with Archie and then start writing it. I imagine that it won't be out this year, probably early next year.

It's always a great pleasure to come back to that character. I do things that are more popular and have more readers, but I almost never do anything that is closer to what I'm really interested in.

McPherson: Personally, I always thought that *The Question* was the only logical follow-up to *Watchmen*.

O'Neil: [laughs] That's high praise. Thank you.

McPherson: Honestly, after reading *Watchmen* and *The Question*, nothing else stands up. The book meant something to me and my brother.

O'Neil: The people who like it *really* like it. It's just that there aren't tens of thousands of them.

It's been the most gratifying series I've ever worked on. Part of the gratification was I really got to write about stuff that concerned me and interested me. The other part is that the response has been very nice, even people reading all those books that I recommended. It astonishes me that anybody would bother to do that.

So it's a character I like to come back to from time to time. I can't for a number of reasons do it as a monthly anymore, but I think we can write one or two stories a year.

McPherson: I think we're out of time. Thanks, it's been a pleasure.

O'Neil: Thank you.

DOUG:

Darwin McPherson: Can you tell me how, after a rather long time off the book, you ended up writing *Batman* again?

Doug Moench: The short answer is that Denny [O'Neil] asked me.

What happened was, Peter Milligan had been doing *Detective* and he was getting off. Then Denny asked me if I wanted to write *Detective* and I didn't really want to at first. I mean, I did, because I really liked Batman. He was also my favorite costumed character. But because of the past, I was a little hesitant. Then I thought, "I need the work. Why not? He's my kind of guy. I'll do it again."

Then we had this first meeting before I even wrote one issue of *Detective*, one of these Bat-summits. At this meeting, a new book was created which became *Shadow of the Bat*. Alan Grant, who had the tenure on *Batman*, was awarded the new book. Then Denny said, "I guess you move from *Detective* to *Batman*."

That's how I got on *Batman*. Chuck Dixon was there because we were going to discuss the *Robin* mini-series. Now we have Alan Grant on *Shadow of the Bat* and me on *Batman* and no one on *Detective*. Then Denny said, "Chuck, how about you do *Detective*?"

That's how the whole thing came about.

McPherson: What would be different for you doing *Batman* from doing *Detective*?

Moench: Well, these days, there really isn't too much difference. In the past, there were periodic attempts to focus more on Batman as a detective in *Detective*. But it never seems to come out that way. I mean, there was as much detective work in *Batman* as there was in *Detective* and as much Batman as the action guy in *Detective* as there was in *Batman*.

These days, I think the only difference would be a slightly less appealing nature for *Detective* because most of the big things would probably have to be done in *Batman*. In *Detective*, you could do perfectly fine stories, great stuff. It's just that if anything really big were to occur, it would probably be reserved for *Batman* rather than *Detective*.

And, of course, *Batman* sells better.

McPherson: Right now, you're leading up to a really big story in *Batman* #500.

Moench: We're in it. I'm done with #500.

McPherson: Can you tell us

"HOW CAN YOU BEAT 'THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN'?"

what's going on?

Moench: *Batman* #500 is in two parts; it's a double-sized issue.

It's Jim Aparo's last *Batman* story. He'll be doing fill-ins and so on, but his last as the regular will be the first half of #500. Our new artist, Mike Manley, will do the second half.

The first half is the last part of "Knightfall" and the second half is the first part of "Knightquest." The new costume appears for the first time on Mike Manley's very first page, which is halfway through #500. Well, it'll appear on the cover, too.

McPherson: Would you compare what's coming with *Batman* #500 with "The Death of Superman?"

Moench: Obviously, they're both "big deal stunts." However, ours was actually, as far as I know, planned before "The Death of Superman." We've been working on this for about a year and a half. And ours was delayed by a number of months; several times it kept getting delayed.

It's a good thing it was because it was evident that "The Death of Superman" was going to be a big thing. We'd get lost in it if we tried to do ours at the same time.

Ours is not as big a deal in the sense that as a "high concept," how can you beat "The Death of Superman?" A guy who can't die, right? We're not doing anything that big on the surface. However, we're doing something that, in certain ways, I feel is an even bigger deal by changing Batman in an extraordinary way.

I don't want to put down "The Death of Superman" by saying I think ours is more than a good story that results in a stunt because I didn't read all of it. I did read the death issue, but I didn't read the ones leading up to it. So for all I know, maybe theirs was just as great.

But it seems like, basically...intrinsically, ours was a stronger idea. Except how can you be stronger than "The Death of Superman?"

McPherson: What do you think of all the rumors that have been flying about?

Moench: Well, I can tell you this: Nobody dies. Bruce Wayne does not die. That rumor is false, absolutely false. Something big does happen to Bruce Wayne, but he does not die.

McPherson: Have you heard anything? What kind of reaction have you been getting from fans--on stuff that they think is going to happen and what's been going on so far?

Moench: Well, I got one death threat. An anonymous telephone call, "If Batman dies, so do you."

I was just at a couple of comic book shops this last Saturday doing a signing. As far as I could tell, it was unanimous...at least among anybody who said anything. Some people just plunked the books down and I signed them and they didn't say anything. But all the ones who spoke to me were really happy with what's going on. It surprised me because I think the really good stuff hasn't started yet. It hasn't come out yet.

With *Batman* #497, it really kicks into high gear. Then #498, 499 and 500. And the issues that Chuck did of *Detective* that fit in there–I'm not sure of the numbers–those are strong, also.

McPherson: Have you ever had anything like a death threat before?

Moench: No, no.

McPherson: No other extreme fan reaction to your work?

Moench: Well, back when I worked at Marvel, I did this thing called "Gabriel: Devil Hunter," which was in the middle of the "Exorcist" craze.

I did get some weird stuff from witches and satanists, but for some reason, I didn't take it that seriously at all. I didn't really take this death threat seriously, but it was more to the point, if you know what I mean. "The Batman dies, so do you." Boom. Then hang up the phone.

I guess because the witches and the satanists seemed so unreal in a sense, we didn't take any of the stuff they sent me seriously. They didn't call me. They sent stuff in the mail, amulets and that weird stuff. I just thought, "Wow, these people are really out there."

McPherson: Okay, can you tell me how you see Batman, Robin, Catwoman, and Azrael in terms of their differences and similarities?

Moench: Catwoman is very similar to Batman in the sense that she's this creature of the night. But of course, she's a thief, which immediately makes for a dissimilarity. They're very similar, but on opposite sides.

However, Catwoman, like Batman, would never kill. So while she's "bad," she's not evil or a murderess or anything. She's not super-bad. She follows the tradition of the French cat burglar and all that stuff. Sort of an anti-hero.

She's getting her own book now and she will be doing many, many good things as well as being a thief. We can't condone her, but we can't really say that she's out and out evil either.

Robin is a lot different from Batman. He's young; he's not grim. His costume is brighter and flashier and so on. Yet he is being molded by Batman, so there are certain similarities. But he's a fresher, more buoyant kind of guy.

Azrael is like Batman taken to the nth degree. He's another very dark, grim creature, but goes beyond where Batman stops.

McPherson: You were writing Batman comics years ago...

Moench: Yeah, that was from about '82 or '83 all the way through '87. I wrote *Batman* and *Detective*, both of them.

McPherson: How's it different now?

Moench: Basically, now we're doing what I wanted to do then. I kept asking for darker, grittier creature of the night type stuff and I was frustrated in my attempts to do that kind of thing.

Now, everybody sees things much more the way I wanted to see him back then. The character, in my absence, has become what I wanted to make it, so it's very comfortable for me.

Not that I'm disowning the stuff I did. I tried to do some of that darker, ethereal stuff back then. Some of it came off and some didn't.

You see, Len Wein was the editor and he's very big on character and soap opera type stuff, so there was more of that in my first run on *Batman*. We're doing more of that now, too, but it has a different feel to it.

McPherson: One of the things we had during your original run was Jason Todd as Robin.

Moench: Yeah.

McPherson: Did you think Jason had to die?

Moench: No, of course not. Neither does Denny. but once he committed to that phone thing, the vote, he was bound to abide by the result. He was shocked and even upset that the vote came in to kill the kid.

I think maybe these people are a little naive not to expect that, because the ones most likely to put out the effort to make the call are the active ones, rather than the passive ones who don't want to see him die. They're not as likely to pick up the phone and make a vote.

Even though I don't think he had to die, I was not in favor of the character in the first place. I came on right after the issue that Jason Todd was introduced. I inherited him. People think I created him, but I didn't. That was Gerry Conway and Len. When I knew I was coming on the book before they did it, Gerry still had a couple of issues to write.

I asked, "Gee, do we have to do this? I'd rather not. Bring in a new Robin? Why? We don't need a new Robin."

Their attitude was a commercial one and I can't say it was wrong. At that point, Robin was in *The New Teen Titans*, which was actually selling better than *Batman*. That's changed, but at that point, it was like *New Teen Titans* was

more important than *Batman*. They wanted Robin in *Titans* rather than be with Batman, but what's Batman without Robin?

How do we solve this? We'll come up with a new Robin. Then we'll change the old Robin into someone else, Nightwing.

So I lost the argument. Actually, what they wanted to do at the beginning was keep Dick Grayson as Robin and bring a new kid in *Batman* and call him something else.

Actually, I won that argument. If you're going to have a new kid sidekick in *Batman*, it's got to be called Robin. So why not change the other guy? And they agreed with me. "Yeah, that does make more sense."

McPherson: How is Tim Drake different from your interpretation of Jason?

Moench: I think he's more carefree. Jason was a darker character and I felt that was the way Jason should be. After all, his parents had just been murdered and all of that. It's a dark thing, so I made him kind of a troubled kid.

Whereas Tim has been much more able to overcome the death of his parents. Everybody has the death of their parents here. Bruce Wayne, Dick Grayson, Jason Todd, and Tim Drake. Same thing for all of them.

Actually, not the death of Tim's parents, just his mother. His father is still alive; they're not talking though. He's not as affected by that as the other characters. The devil-may-care approach is better for him.

McPherson: Do you have any thoughts on the change they made with Jason, the "post-*Crisis*" Jason? Once he was pretty much a normal kid, then he became a hood stealing the hub caps off the Batmobile.

Moench: I was not in favor of it. I don't know if that was Denny's idea or what, but I personally didn't like it. I think it was Max Allan Collins's.

I could understand why they would do that because of what I just said. His origin was so similar to Dick Grayson's. Again, I did not do that; that was Gerry Conway. So I could see why they would change that, but I don't especially like the way they did it.

I guess it's not too bad, but it just didn't work for me personally. What can I say?

McPherson: Okay. It seems that lately Superman has been developing and evolving. He proposed to Lois, revealed his identity, and eventually died. Do you think Batman can be that fluid in his evolution?

Moench: Oh, yeah. I think in certain ways even more than that. We're definitely doing big things with Batman.

McPherson: Really? It seems that Batman is always just a Dark Knight who watches over Gotham City.

Moench: Well, ultimately, he always will be. But there are other aspects upon which big changes can be made, and we're making them.

I don't think there's anything fundamentally wrong with him being the Dark Knight. In fact, that's a big strength. Gotham's Dark Angel. That's a perfect concept.

McPherson: But is there any life for Bruce Wayne outside of being Batman?

Moench: Yeah, we're going to focus on that in the future. We've had a number of meetings in which that was discussed and we have a number of ways to approach that.

McPherson: Do you think Batman should interact more with the DC Universe or less?

Moench: Personally, and selfishly, I prefer less because he does not, by his nature, have super-powers. He's an ordinary guy who has trained himself to be extraordinary with no help from a yellow sun or a power ring or a chemical bath. He is totally different from the other ones.

I know that *World's Finest* was a tradition in which Superman and Batman teamed up. "Golly gee, wasn't it cool to see your two favorite guys, Superman and

"THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH BATMAN TEAMING UP WITH A NUMBER OF DC CHARACTERS, AS LONG AS THEY'RE ALSO NON-SUPERPOWERED."

Batman, together?" But dramatically, the story never really worked for me because I could never figure out why Superman would need Batman for anything. Except if you said, "Well, Superman's dumb, therefore, he needs Batman's detective mind." And that diminished Superman, so that never really worked.

Similarly, I don't think Batman works as well with any of the super-guys. However, commercially and for the sake of continuity (which we all think is cool and nifty), he'll be interacting with the other characters. He just won't do it as much or as extensively as the Flash and Green Lantern getting together. That makes perfect sense. Superman and Wonder Woman... These things all fit.

Batman is the odd man out. Yeah, he exists in the same reality as the other ones, but we just don't dwell on it in the *Batman* books. In other words, when Batman needs one of these super-characters, it's 99 out of 100 times going to be in the other book, not in *Batman*.

McPherson: Do you think when something major happens in the DC Universe that it should be reflected in *Batman*? And should what happens in *Batman* be reflected elsewhere?

Moench: Yeah, and it will, it will.

By the way, I'm speaking just of the super-ones. There's nothing wrong with Batman teaming up with a number of DC characters, as long as they're also non-superpowered. Such as Green Arrow, Black Canary, Huntress, the Question. There's a bunch of them that Batman fits with very well and we'll be seeing that kind of stuff. You just won't see Green Lantern and those guys.

McPherson: Will we be seeing more of a presence of the DC Universe in *Batman*? It seems that Batman reflects in them, but not necessarily the other way around.

Moench: Yeah. The increased presence will be probably after "Knightquest," because we've got so much going on in that.

We do have a few things. We have Oracle. Nightwing makes an appearance. The Huntress. That's about it for a while. But I think in *Shadow of the Bat* you'll see a lot of that.

McPherson: Are you writing any other Batman-related projects?

Moench: Am I ever. I'm finishing *Dark Joker: The Wild*, which is another one of those hardcover graphic novels. It's like *Red Rain*. That's with Kelley Jones and John Beatty. After that, Kelley and I are doing the sequel to *Red Rain*, which is called *Blood Storm*.

And then, I'll be doing *Batman vs. Predator II* with Paul Gulacy. And following that, Paul and I are going to do a Batman/Elseworlds mini-series.

What else...? Well, the *Showcase* stuff has Batman type characters--Catwoman, Robin, Two-Face, Nightwing, Huntress, and Batman occasionally pops up in those. I think that's all the Batman-type stuff right now.

McPherson: You seem to be doing a lot of the Elseworlds projects.

Moench: Yes, in fact, the *Red Rain* hardcover graphic novels are going to be a trilogy. There's actually going to be a third one after *Blood Storm*. But that's a little bit in the future. We finish up *Dark Joker* first, which is not related to *Red Rain*, except it'll be the same format.

McPherson: What is it about the Elseworlds concept that appeals to you with Batman?

Moench: There's so much freedom. So many opportunities to do big things with the character–like turn him into a vampire or do a sword-and-sorcery Batman. In *Dark Joker*, the Joker is a sorcerer and Batman is an elemental Bat creature, as much bat as he is human.

You just can't do that kind of stuff in the regular book. Elseworlds gives you freedom and it opens all kinds of creativity. The character is so good. He's too good to be limited by his own reality, if you know what I mean.

While there are Elseworlds versions of all kinds of DC stuff,

there's a Superman Elseworlds, a Green Lantern Elseworlds... I think it really finds a perfect niche with the Batman, at least from my personal point of view. It's really suited for that.

McPherson: Are you working on any non-Batman related projects?

Moench: Yeah, I'm doing this super-hero group. Sort of a skewed version of a super-hero group called *Xenobrood*. That'll be with Tomm Coker.

Another *James Bond* for Dark Horse...

McPherson: With Paul Gulacy?

Moench: No, Russ Heath.

McPherson: Great.

Moench: What else am I doing? Oh, *The Big Book of Conspiracies* for Andy Helfer and Piranha Press. It's a 224-page book, hopefully the start of an exciting new line of stuff from Piranha. It's non-fiction.

McPherson: Is it straight text or is it illustrated?

Moench: No, it's comics, but it's comics with a difference, being non-fiction. It's more like, I don't know, certain underground things maybe. Larry Gonnick's *Cartoon History of the Universe*...sort of like that, but different. Different from those, also. I hope it's going to be its own thing. But it's definitely comics. It has captions and balloons, panels and all that.

McPherson: What do you prefer writing? The down-to-earth adventure of Batman and James Bond or the more fantastical stuff like *Six From Sirius* or *Xenobrood*?

Moench: You know, the thing I really liked was *Slash Maraud* that Paul Gulacy and I did. That was like a combination of the two. Down-to-Earth, but also crazy and fantastical.

I guess that answers the question. I like both. When I have a chance to combine the two, I like that even more.

I don't think I could do either one exclusively. I need to refresh myself by moving back and forth. If everything I did was down-to-Earth, I'd get bored. And if everything I did was fantasy, I'd get bored with that, too. Being able to shift back and forth and do totally different writing styles seems to help keep me fresh.

McPherson: Okay, I think this is about it. Is there anything else you'd like to say about *Batman* #500?

Moench: I think it's the best script I've done for the regular *Batman* books. If the art turns out right...boy, it should be good! I think Denny [and his assistant] Jordan [Gorfinkel] agree and Scott Peterson agrees. They all said, "Boy, that was a good one."

And it should be. *Batman* #500 is a big deal, just for the anniversary number alone. But on top of it is the culmination of a big, big deal of a storyline. So if anything deserved my best effort, it was this one.

McPherson: I'll be looking forward to it. Thanks a lot.

Moench: Okay.

"I THINK [*BATMAN* #500 IS] THE BEST SCRIPT I'VE DONE FOR THE REGULAR *BATMAN* BOOKS."

GRAHAM:

"I THINK BATMAN IS THE ULTIMATE HERO IN THE DC UNIVERSE."

Darwin McPherson: Can you tell me how you ended up drawing *Detective Comics*?

Graham Nolan: I decided I was finished with *Hawkworld* and wanted to move on to other projects. I had sent some xeroxes to Denny and kept calling him. They were in-between artists, so they had an opening on four issues.

Then I guess on the strength of that, they asked me if I wanted to do *The Vengeance of Bane*. When an opening finally came on *Detective* a few months later, I was the first one considered.

McPherson: You did some design work on *Vengeance of Bane*, didn't you?

Nolan: Yeah, I designed him. I designed Bane and all the other characters–"The Terrible Trio." I guess they don't have a name, do they?

Now they're known as "The Terrible Trio." [laughs]

McPherson: Did you have any input into the creation of Bane or his personality?

Nolan: No, he was pretty much fleshed out already.

McPherson: Have you ever gone to one of these infamous Batman summits?

Nolan: No. We had a mini-summit at the last Great Eastern show, but it wasn't really a Bat-summit. It was more like a *Detective* summit. It was Scott [Peterson, *Detective Comics* editor], Chuck [Dixon, writer], and [inker] Scott Hanna.

McPherson: You came into "Knightfall" in about the middle. What did you think when you heard about what was going to happen to Batman?

Nolan: I knew what was going on from *Vengeance of Bane* because Bane was created and designed before the "Knightfall" storyline. I knew from the beginning.

McPherson: Did you think, "Wow, that's terrible" or "Wow, that's great?"

Nolan: What he goes through, which I'm not really at liberty to say, has evolved from the basic idea to what was finally decided upon. It's gone through some changes.

I really, really like the final product. It's better than what the original ideas were.

McPherson: How do you see Batman? Do you see him as a grim-and-gritty Dark Knight or a Caped Crusading super-hero?

Nolan: A little bit of both. I think Batman is the ultimate hero in the DC Universe because he has taken adversity in his life and channeled it into something positive. He's dedicated his life to making this decayed city a better place for those who live there. So to me, he's the ultimate hero. He sacrifices so much for everybody else.

McPherson: Do you think that

Bruce Wayne is as important to Batman as Batman is to Bruce Wayne?

Nolan: Absolutely. They're not two different people. They're the same person.

McPherson: Are they? Can't any-

body put on a Batman costume and be Batman?

Nolan: No, absolutely not. Batman is a persona created from a tragic event in Bruce Wayne's life. I don't think anybody else could possibly be Batman.

McPherson: Well, you know Robin isn't necessarily Dick Grayson. Robin is Tim Drake or Jason Todd or whoever puts on the costume.

Nolan: Right, but he's not the same. They are two different types of people. Robin is an extension. If there wasn't a Batman, there wouldn't be a Robin. So Batman's influence could shape a Robin, but there's nobody to shape a Batman other than Bruce Wayne.

McPherson: Okay. So what's it like doing *Detective*?

Nolan: It's been great. I love it.

If there wasn't a Batman, there wouldn't be a "Graham Nolan; cartoonist," that's for sure. Because when I was a kid and the TV show was on, that influenced me a lot–and the comic books. Batman was a seminal influence on me, so it's something I always wanted to do.

HAT IS STRANGE. REATURE CLOAKED IN ITMARE. A FIGURE OF RROR IN A CITY OF TERROR.
AND YET YOU WILL NOT BREAK THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Having an opportunity to work on it with talented people such as Scott Hanna, Chuck Dixon and Scott Peterson really is a thrill.

McPherson: Wasn't *Detective* the title you always wanted to do?

Nolan: Yes, it is, actually. *Detective* comics were the first Batman comics that I read. Also, the first appearance of Batman was in *Detective*; it's his home. Also, DC gets its name from it. It has a long history. I've big shoes to fill working on it.

McPherson: Do you have any input into the story so far?

Nolan: No. Most of the stories and the direction were all hashed out at the last Bat-conference. I wasn't involved with that.

I guess for the next batch of storylines, I'll have some input. At least I can offer suggestions and input. Whether they use them or not, who knows?

McPherson: Is there anything you'd like to say to the people reading the Batman comics now or those who'll pick it up as "Knightfall" rolls along?

Nolan: I think people that are reading it, especially the old-time Batman fans, are in for a real treat. We're making a concerted effort to bring Batman back to the greatness that he should have.

He's been portrayed in recent years as a psychopath and a nut case. It seems to me that he's becoming a lot more heroic. I think the old-time fans will really enjoy seeing Batman as a great hero again.

I think the new fans will enjoy it, too. They're hopping on a great storyline. The whole "Knightfall" series should have a lot of impact.

MIKE:

Darwin McPherson: First off, can you tell me how you ended up getting involved with Batman?

Mike Manley: After *Darkhawk* #25, I decided that I was going to leave the title because I had done 25 issues straight. I figured 25 issues in a row is a pretty long run by today's standards. I was getting a little burned out and I didn't want to start doing poor quality work. So I wanted to leave after #25, which was the biggest-selling issue, probably, since #1.

I'd known Archie Goodwin for several years, so I decided to go over to DC to see if he had any *Legends of the Dark Knight* for me to do. I figured what I would do was float around and see what else I could pick up. [Archie] gave me the *Legends of the Dark Knight Annual* to do which, in turn, led to other people seeing samples of my work–specifically Neal Pozner and, I think, Denny [O'Neil].

Then one evening at about 7:30 at night, Denny calls me up and goes, "Would you like to do *Batman*?" I thought about it for about 30 seconds and I said, "Yeah, sure!" It was great because they asked me, so I feel very flattered.

McPherson: Have you always wanted to do Batman?

Manley: I would say he was one of the characters from when I was a real fan, back in my teens, that I liked. Specifically, what Neal Adams did on him. I was a super big fan of his stuff; I used to blatantly imitate his stuff. I used to draw so much like Neal Adams that it hurt.

Maybe I'm different from some other people, because it's rare that I would fall in love with a character. Usually, I would fall in love with a character because the artist that I like is doing the book. Since Neal did a lot of Batman stories, I ended up liking the character.

McPherson: How do you see Batman? Do you see him more as a grim and gritty Dark Knight or as a reasonably well-adjusted Caped Crusader? Or as something different entirely?

Manley: It's something that I had to ask myself because I didn't read Batman comics for a long time really–besides the ones that Neal Adams and Denny O'Neil did. Occasionally, I would look at the title if somebody like Michael Golden or somebody that I liked worked on it.

That was my reference point, basically, until [Frank] Miller came along and did *The Dark Knight* and then with [David] Mazzucchelli did "Year One." That seems to have set the tone.

Adams came back and established the creature of the night, the dark aspect of the character, being spooky and creepy. I imagine it will take a few issues to get my own feeling of the character

"I USED TO DRAW SO MUCH LIKE NEAL ADAMS THAT IT HURT."

because in a way, I'm working off of the inspiration of artists that I admired as a teenager. That's what's firing me right now.

I don't really know. He's pretty much a dark, grim character. I think he has a pretty bent personality in some ways. He's obsessing upon this one event so much that he's willing to put himself through all of this torture and pain, mentally and physically, to avenge the death of his parents.

It also depends upon what Doug Moench has in store for the character. At this point, I have just received the script for *Batman* #500 and I will be starting on it within the next week or so. I've talked briefly with Jordan [Gorfinkel, O'Neil's assistant] and I've talked briefly with Doug.

It's like everything is speeding along so fast. You just have to grab on.

McPherson: What's it like, coming in at the tail end of a rather exciting storyline?

Manley: There are four or five different Batman books now, so different parts of the story take place in the different titles. I get a script from Doug Moench and it's like a telephone book. It's huge compared to the plots that I usually get from Marvel.

So there is a bit of an adjustment working from a full script. That's going to take a rearranging of the creative process at the beginning.

McPherson: Are there other differences that you noticed in making the switch from Marvel to DC?

"[BATMAN'S] PRETTY MUCH A DARK, GRIM CHARACTER. I THINK HE HAS A PRETTY BENT PERSONALITY IN SOME WAYS."

Manley: Well, I would have to say that for me, the main difference is that DC wants me to be the best Mike Manley on the character. They all seem to be very encouraging and very excited to see what I'm going to turn out. [laughs] I hope I don't screw it up and disappoint everybody and send the sales into the dumpster.

I think there is a difference of personalities of the people that I'm working with, just like when you change any job. You go from one job to another, you have to get to know the people at the job and then you develop a rapport and a routine with them.

I'm really looking forward to being able to collaborate more closely with Doug Moench and Denny on this stuff. It's hard to say how things are going to turn out because as of this point, I have drawn only several pages of the *Legends of the Dark Knight Annual.* I'm also inking an issue of *Shadow of the Bat* that my good friend Bret Blevins is doing.

In fact, he's the guy who recommended that I go see Archie. Bret broke his contract at Marvel, went to DC and got a good reception there. They gave him *Legends of the Dark Knight* #50 to do, which is retelling the first meeting of Batman and the Joker. He was very ecstatic about the way things were going so he said, "You should go. You should call Archie, you should go see him!"

So I did, although it made me feel a little strange because I did know Archie to a degree socially. I felt like, "I don't want to

AND SPEAKING OF PLEASED -- YOUR PERFORMANCE WAS MOST ENJOYABLE!
"LET ME BE HUMAN AGAIN!" OH, ROMULUS, SO CONVINCING!
COPYRIGHT © MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC.

call him up and ask for a job." [laughs] That's what I did, anyway.

McPherson: You mentioned that you want to collaborate with Moench. Do you want to write any Batman stories on your own?

Manley: At this point, it's too soon in the creative process for me. I think what I really want to do now is to concentrate on the art side of it.

I think that they have the plots of the next seven, eight, nine stories at this point. I would imagine to around *Batman* #510 to 512. I just want to concentrate on the artwork right now. I think if I was to try to concentrate too heavily on the plotting, it would become too much.

Sure, I would like to do a Batman story myself somewhere down the road or stories with other characters. But I'm quite happy at this point to be able to pencil and ink my own work on a monthly basis and I'm trying to take my work up another level or two. That's very difficult when you have to produce a certain amount of pages a day. Day in and day out, week after week, you can't fall behind or books start missing shipping.

I think if I was to try to write...I'm so booked now, even besides *Batman*, with other special projects, I really don't have the time.

McPherson: So you're going to ink *Batman* as well?

Manley: Yeah. That's a goal I made for myself after doing that off and on on *Darkhawk*. Nothing against other people that I've worked with. Ricardo [Villagran] is a great guy. I have had other people help me from time to time on the book, but there is a certain satisfaction that you have when you finish the artwork yourself. If you mess it up, at least *you* mess it up. If it's successful, then you feel good. I look at the inking as really the drawing.

The way comics are set up today, they specialize everybody so that you have guys that just pencil, guys who just ink. You have

guys who pencil who, if you asked them to ink their work, would be absolutely lost. I try to take more after the old school where most of the guys inked their own work.

In the end, on my work, besides the layout, the inking is the most important stage. Because after you erase the page, the pencil is gone and the only thing left is the ink. If the inker isn't very good, if the inker you're working with loses your drawing or the emotional quality of your work, it can severely alter the impact that you're trying to give the reader on the page, besides destroying the drawing.

McPherson: How quick are you if you can pencil and ink a monthly comic book?

Manley: I would average three pages a day of either pencils or inks. I have done substantially more than that, but three pages a day is a real comfortable rate. I think if you start pushing it up to doing four or five pages a day, the quality of the work is going to suffer because you're just going to have to start cutting corners.

A lot of the guys who work at Image or the guys who are working on the X-books–their work is more design-oriented. My work is more reality-oriented, for lack of a better term. I am very influenced by the comic strip artists like [Alex] Raymond and [Hal] Foster and artists whose work is a lot more illustrative.

It's hard [to draw quickly] when you try to draw more realistically and you're using a lot of reference. I don't want to sacrifice the quality by picking up the pace at this point.

McPherson: Are you doing any inking besides your own stuff?

Manley: From time to time, I still ink an occasional issue of something by Bret. I inked an issue of *Hardware* by Denys Cowan, #4. I think I'm going to be inking another issue now. I was going to try to ink his book regularly, but the deadlines are just so close right now that I can't do it.

But I do enjoy inking because, for me, it's a real relaxing exercise. Because the hard work in the pencilling is not necessarily in the physical drawing of a person or an object, but in deciding what angle to use and how you're going to lay it out or searching for

"I HAVE HAD OTHER PEOPLE HELP ME FROM TIME TO TIME ON THE BOOK, BUT THERE IS A CERTAIN SATISFACTION THAT YOU HAVE WHEN YOU FINISH THE ARTWORK YOURSELF."

"WITH COMPETITION BEING THE WAY IT IS IN THE MARKETPLACE TODAY, YOU'VE GOT TO COME UP WITH SOME GOOD IDEAS TO CAPTURE THE READERSHIP."

reference.

When I get pencils, the artist has already thought it out. Then it's up to me to finish it off and try to capture or enhance what he's put down the on the page. So I hope to keep inking.

McPherson: Getting back to Batman...I guess you're aware Batman gets a new costume as you come on the book.

Manley: Yeah, he's getting a new costume. I'll be working on that now. #500 is split into two parts. Jim Aparo is doing the first half and that's going to be inked by Terry Austin. And then, starting right on the first page that I do, he's in his new costume.

How long he will have the new costume, I don't know because I'm just as surprised as everybody else is at this point. I don't know the full story.

McPherson: Graham Nolan told me the costume was a little difficult to draw.

Manley: It's pretty complicated. We'll see. If you look at the X-Men costumes, those are pretty complicated. But if you drew them about 400 times over the course of the year, you can generate 'em out of your imagination, no problem. It's just part of the job.

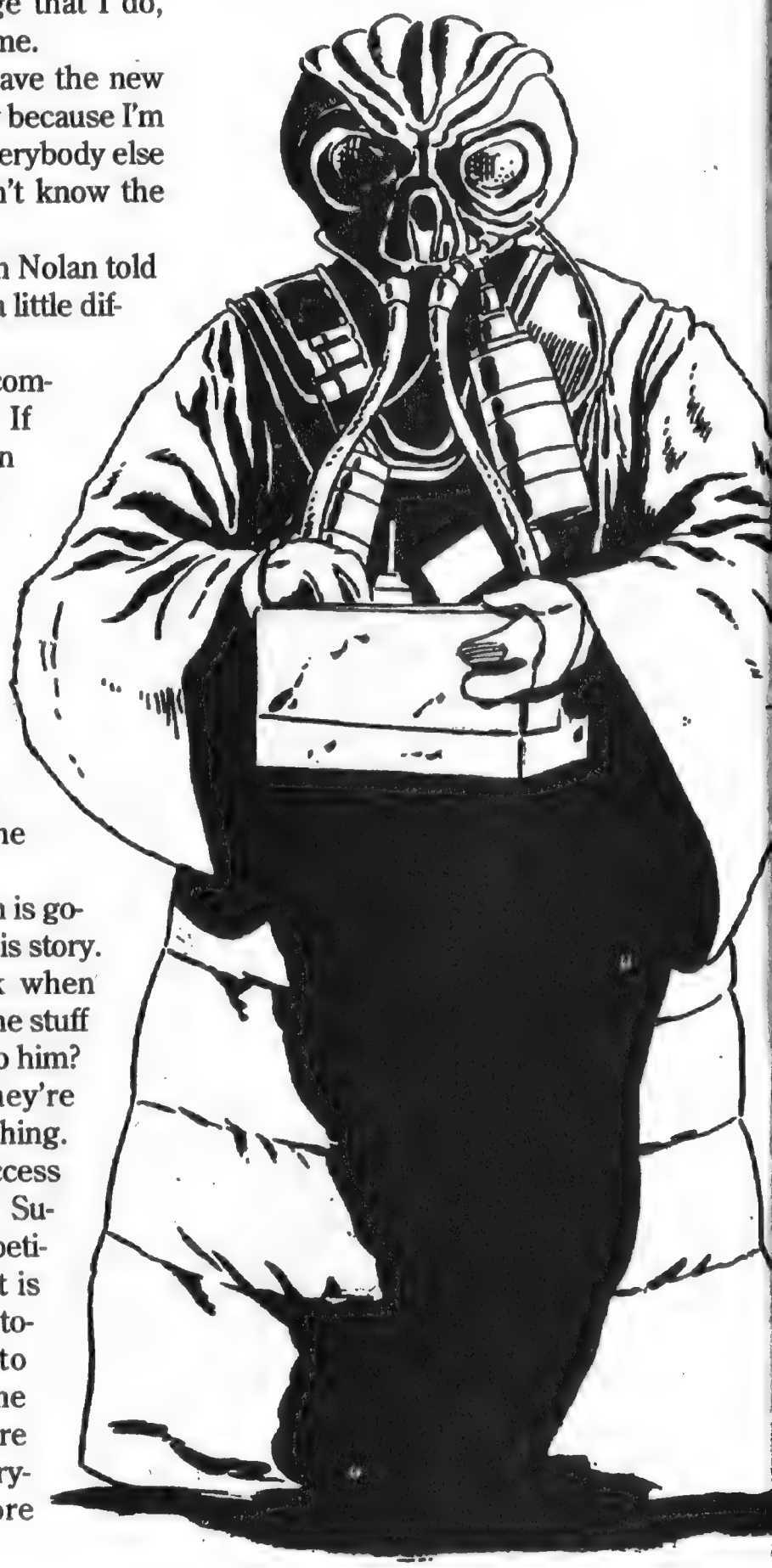
McPherson: Batman is going through a lot in this story. What did you think when you heard about all the stuff that was happening to him?

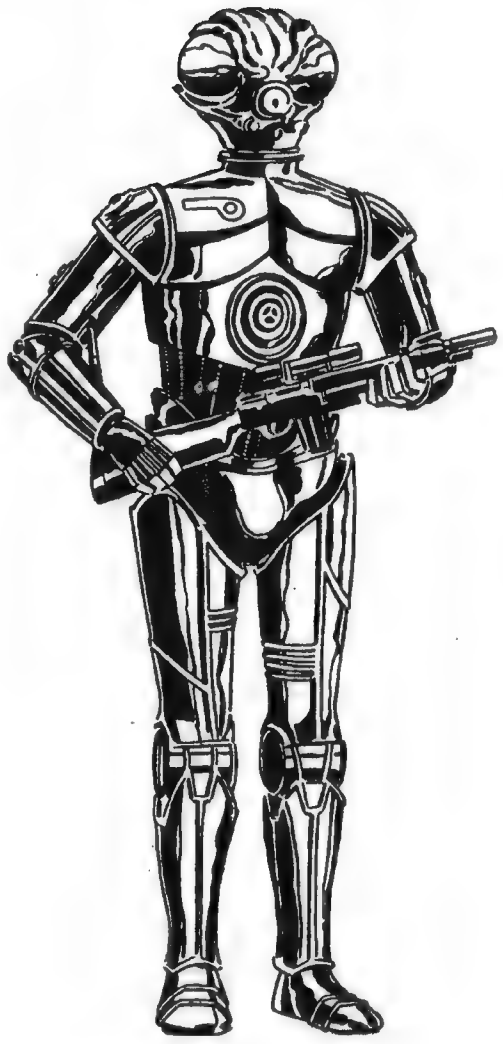
Manley: I think they're doing a real smart thing. They had a great success with "The Death of Superman." With competition being the way it is in the marketplace today, you've got to come up with some good ideas to capture the readership. Everybody has a lot more choices today.

I think what they've come up with is great so far and I think that some people may have guessed what it is while some people won't have guessed at all.

I think the best thing about Batman is that he's such a basic, simple character that so many people can do so many different takes and interpretations on him. I think that's why he's lasted 50 years. The are a lot of characters who are interesting, but they haven't lasted 50 years.

It's the same with Superman. Maybe it's a little bit more difficult with Superman because you can't make him a dark Superman.





It might be a little bit harder to do certain things with a character like that. Whereas Batman is a vigilante and I think that those are timeless characters. They can appeal to a lot of different people in a lot of different ways.

McPherson: Do you think Batman goes far enough in his dealings with criminals? Do you think he should be a bit more ruthless or is he fine as he is?

Manley: The Batman of old or the Batman of new?

McPherson: The Batman of new.

Manley: It's hard to say. I really think that it just depends upon what each creator, what each writer or each artist is going to bring to the character and what kind of story they're trying to tell. If you're trying to tell a story of a guy who's slowly, inch by inch, losing it, he may slip. He may go a little bit too far; he may whale on somebody a little bit too hard.

That is also something that's been done a lot. Part of the problem all people face in the business now is that you get on a character like Batman that's been around so long, you have to ask yourself, "What haven't they done with him?" The's been so much done with him.

Also, I think with the movies and things like that, there's a certain amount of restriction as to what they can do with the character.

McPherson: Do you think what happened at the end of *The Killing Joke* was right? A lot of people believe Batman's behavior, laughing with the Joker, was uncalled for considering what happened to Barbara Gordon. She should've been avenged harshly and immediately.

Manley: Well, when I look at *The Killing Joke*, I thought they were playing up the duality of the characters because they're both...Batman, to an extent...insane.

The idea that somebody would shoot his parents and then he puts on a costume and night after night after night, year after year, go out and become this avenging creature says that this guy might have a few screws loose somewhere. I think those make the most interesting kinds of characters. The characters that are a little bit off, a little bit touched. Those are the kinds of characters that people like to see and like to read about.

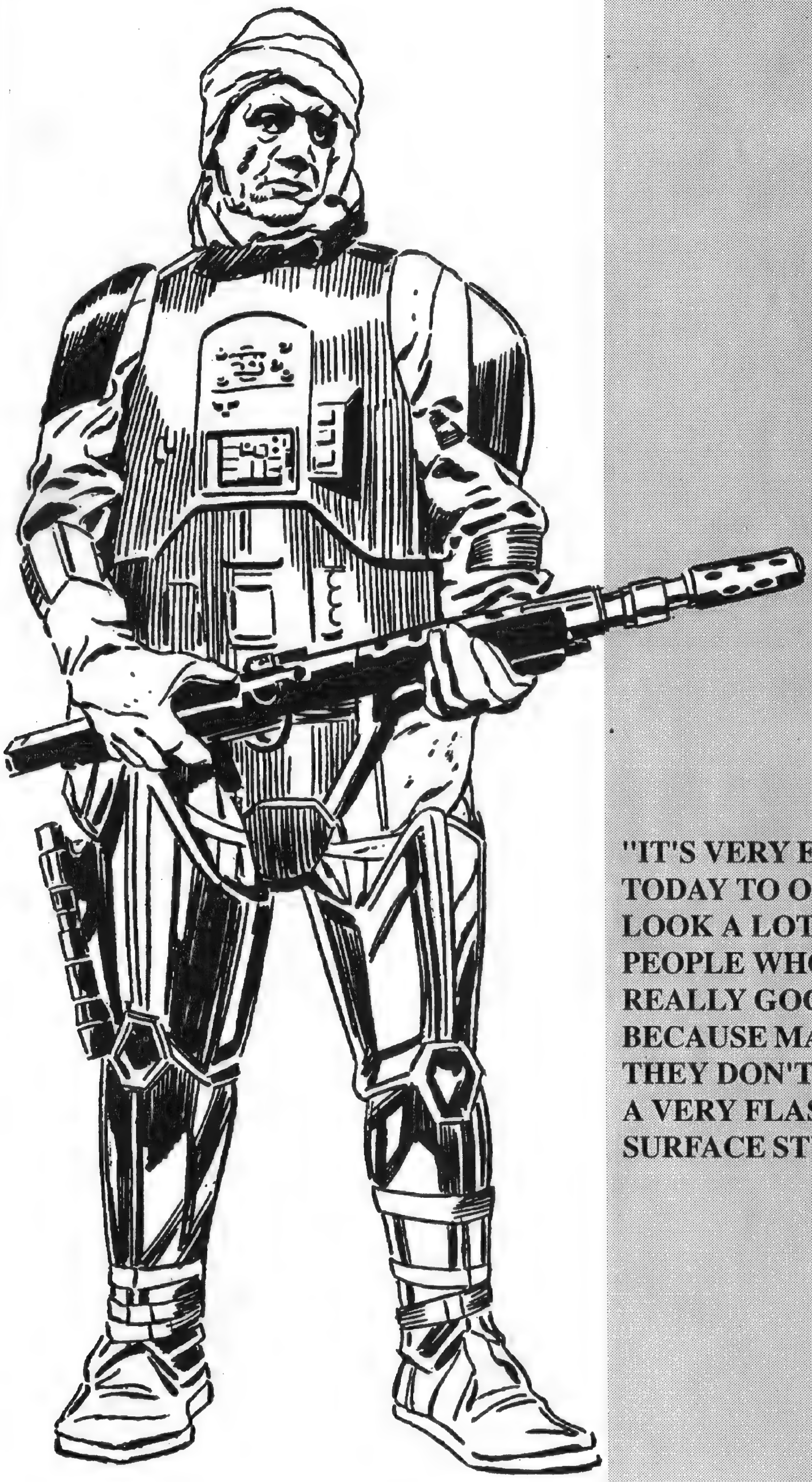
It gives the writer a lot more meat to play with, too. If Batman was like Sherlock Holmes, it would be boring as a super-hero comic.

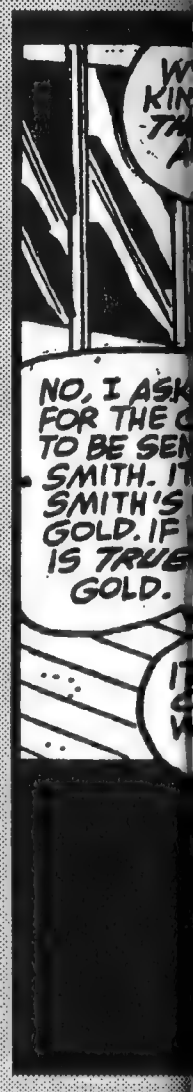
McPherson: Do you read a lot of comics?

Manley: What happened to me–I don't know if it happens to other people in the business–I used to read a lot of comics before I started doing it seven days a week for a living. And now that I do, there are very few comics that I actually read. I usually look at comics. It's very rare that I will actually read a comic. I don't read them like I did when I was a fan.

Usually, when I'm not at my board producing it, I want to get away, forget it, and recharge, so that I can come back to

"IF BATMAN WAS LIKE SHERLOCK HOLMES, IT WOULD BE BORING AS A SUPER-HERO COMIC."





"IT'S VERY EASY TODAY TO OVER-LOOK A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE REALLY GOOD BECAUSE MAYBE THEY DON'T HAVE A VERY FLASHY SURFACE STYLE."

"ONCE THERE WAS A MASTER OF SINANJU NAMED YI WHO WAS IN THE SERVICE OF A MOORISH KING OF SPAIN.
"THIS MOORISH KING WAS BESET BY A PRETENDER. BUT HE KNEW NOT WHICH PRINCE COVETED HIS CROWN. HE OFFERED MASTER YI A SUM OF GOLD TO EXPOSE AND ELIMINATE THE CULPRIT.
WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?
COPYRIGHT © WILL MURRAY

it the next day or after the weekend with a fresh approach.

I've been looking at the stuff they've been sending me for reference, so I can get a feel of what's going on. The only comic I make sure I read is *Eightball*. [laughs]

And *Xenozoic Tales*. I always read that, too.

McPherson: Mark [Schultz] has mentioned you to me, so I figured you must read that, too.

Manley: I've been a fan and supporter of Mark's since I saw his first work back in '85 or '86. I thought, "Great, here's another guy who likes the same guys I like. He likes Wally Wood, Raymond, and Foster. All the great guys." I wish he produced more work.

But the artists I really like are mostly guys from Europe. [Jordi] Benet, the guy who does *Torpedo*; Paul Gillon, who's from France; of course, Moebius; and people like that.

There are not a lot of American artists that I'm a big fan of. I love Mike Mignola's work; of course, Bret Blevins; and John Romita, Jr...I think he's probably the best guy in the field today; he's extremely underrated.

It's very easy today to overlook a lot of people who are really good because maybe they don't have a very flashy surface style. Maybe their talent comes in the layout or the pacing of the story. That's not something that might capture the reader's eye in a very obvious way. Whereas you might have some kind of slick inking style–using a lot of splatter or whatever, a very mannered style. That is what you will notice.

You will notice a very affected drawing, but you might not notice that a guy like J.R. is an extremely, *extremely* brilliant storyteller.

McPherson: Oh, I agree. I noticed it years ago. I told people and they didn't believe me. But you can follow his stories without even looking at the script.

Manley: The fact that it's understated like that, the fact that it's not obvious, is its strength. But in a market today where everybody is trying to blow up in your face, the guys with the most surface

style, the most obvious gimmick, are the ones everybody notices. Where an artist like Alex Toth, most readers today wouldn't be able to relate to because he doesn't have a very obvious surface style. His stuff is a little more cerebral.

McPherson: Do you worry about the state of the comics industry, where so many talented artists are overlooked?

Manley: I think everything goes in cycles. I mean, I throw myself in there with people like J.R. or Mike Mignola. I'm not comparing myself artistically or anything like that. What I'm trying to say is, I've been doing comics since '84 and the business has changed an awful lot as far as the taste of the readership, everything, royalties, the whole business. Even more so the last year or two because of the Image guys.

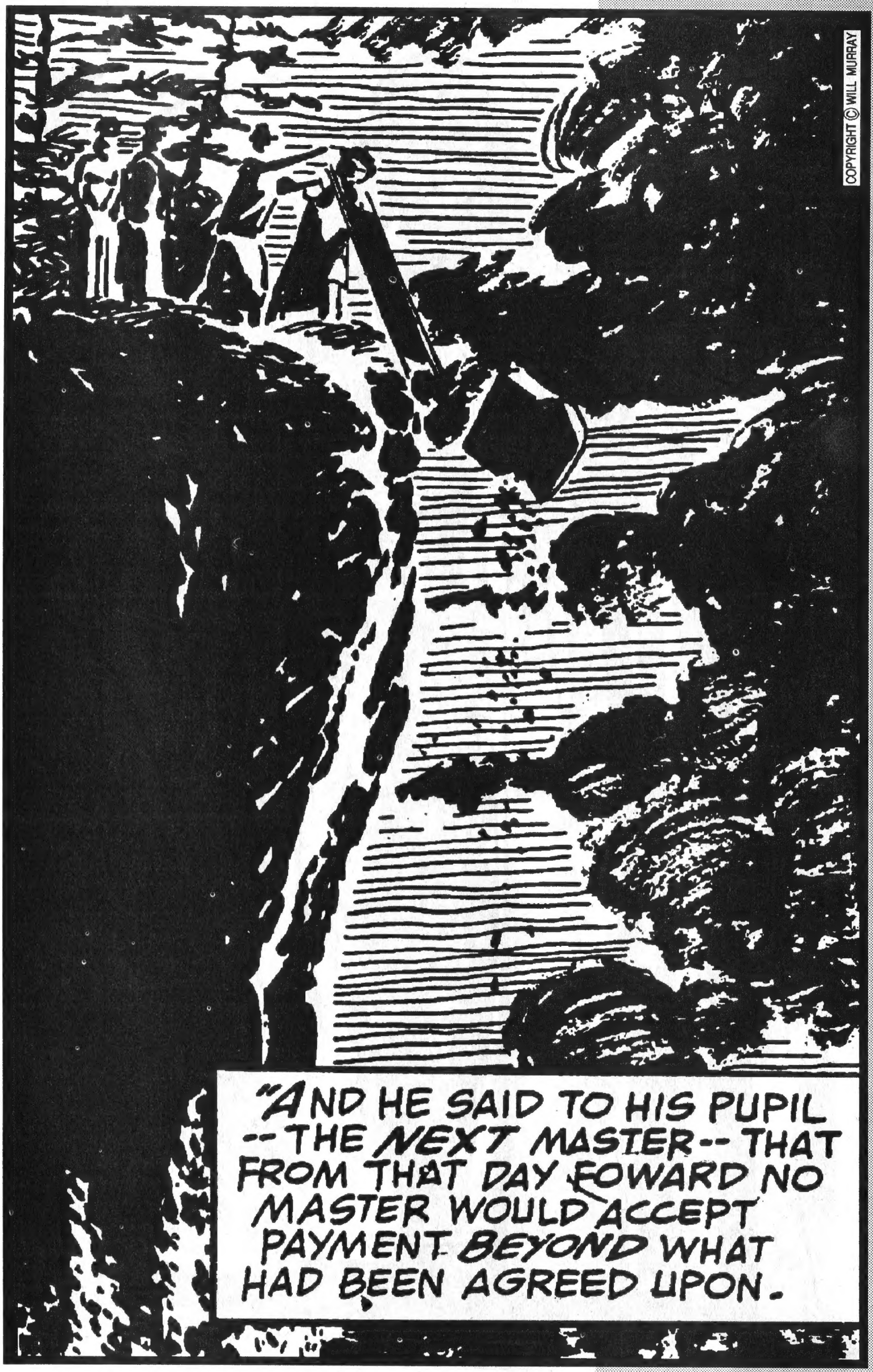
There are a lot of guys out there who work really hard to do good comics. But maybe they're not on the hot character or on the hot book, and they tend to get overlooked. But the fact that the business is going so strong just means that eventually, if you work hard enough, you have an opportunity.

J.R. is doing the X-Men now, so I'm sure readers are going to take notice of him because of that. They definitely noticed him on the Punisher and I'm sure they'll notice him on the X-Men, where I don't think they noticed him as much on Daredevil, although all that stuff was great.

McPherson: Okay, I think we're almost out of time. Is the anything else you want to say about being the artist on *Batman*?

Manley: I guess I'm going to try harder than ever to do the best I can because the competition's stiff. If you can't hack it, you can be replaced easily.

After many years of toiling for the original Amazing Heroes, *Darwin McPherson went on to write promotional copy for DC Comics. He's about ready to make the move to big-time comics writer, but he hasn't quit his day job yet.*


COPYRIGHT © WILL MURRAY
"AND HE SAID TO HIS PUPIL --THE NEXT MASTER-- THAT FROM THAT DAY FOWARD NO MASTER WOULD ACCEPT PAYMENT BEYOND WHAT HAD BEEN AGREED UPON.

COPYRIGHT © LUCAS FILMS WEST END GAMES

Flesh